

The Invasion of Italy

87

The issue was decided at the first encounter. Constantine charged at the head of his Gallic horse —now accustomed to and certain of victory— into the cavalry of Maxentius, which broke and ran in disorder from the field. Only the Praetorians made a gallant and stubborn resistance and fell where they had stood, knowing that it was they who had raised Maxentius to the throne and that their destruction was involved in his. While these fought valiantly with the courage of despair, their comrades were crowding in panic towards the already choked bridges. At the Milvian Bridge the passage was jammed, and the pursuers wrought great execution. The pontoon bridge collapsed, owing to the treachery of those who had cut or loosened its supports. All the reports agree that there was a sickening slaughter, and that hundreds were drowned in the Tiber in their vain effort to escape. Among the victims was Maxentius himself. He was either thrust into the river by the press of frenzied fugitives or was drowned in trying to scale the high bank on the opposite shore, when weighed down by his heavy armour. His corpse was recovered later from the stream, which the Panegyrists hailed in ecstatic terms as the co-saviour of Rome with Constantine and the partner of his triumph."*

The victor entered Rome. He had won the prize which he sought—the mastery of the West—and, like scores of Roman conquerors before him, he marched through the famous streets. His tri-

* Pan, Vet., ix., 18.